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# Calcutta University Magazine.

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## THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS.

It is, on the whole, a good thing for a man that he should be amenable to what is usually known as public opinion. It is a vague, indefinable thing, this public opinion. Often rather a very shallow thing, with not much depth of thought, and not much sense of responsibility behind it. And yet is it not better than your private passion or individual inclination? And is not what you call your judgment, in many cases, but the embodiment of your passion or inclination? The "public" has rather a rough way of dealing with things. And yet this very roughness is its best recommendation while dealing with the actions or judgments of an individual. It secures at any rate a greater freedom from passion and prejudice than the individual himself is perhaps entitled to claim. The student has the public opinion of his class to reckon with in respect of his daily conduct, just as the ordinary man of the world has the public opinion of society at large, or of the particular community which he constantly frequents, and wherein the main occupation of his life lies, constantly behind him to regulate his conduct. A keen sensitiveness to this public opinion is certainly a virtue most earnestly to be desired, because an absence of it would indicate a want of social life, an atrophy of the proper vital relationship with the immediate surroundings which constitutes the best part of a man's life.

\*     \*

And yet it is a fact that this public opinion itself may be vitally deficient,—may be of a low standard, putting the emphasis on the wrong points, wanting in courage to speak out what it thinks, wanting in insight to see the right things, wanting in the proper moral instincts to feel as it ought to feel. Just as your best friend may sometimes err



and try, through passion and prejudice, to impose upon you views and opinions and even conduct which you feel are not the right things, so the whole body of opinion with which you are most intimately in contact and upon which your intellectual and moral being in a way rests, may sometimes give way, in most vital points, and leave you in the air to support yourself as best you can. Then you look around and realize that

“ Ten men love what I hate,  
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive ;  
Ten, who in years and eyes  
Match me : we all surmise,  
They this thing, and I that : whom shall my soul believe ? ”

Long years hence perhaps the time will come when you may have an opportunity to turn round and ask :

Was I, the world arraigned,  
Were they, my soul disdained,  
Right ? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last !

In the meantime you have to commune with your own soul, and satisfy yourself by the severest self-examination that everything is right *there !* These are the moments to remember the precious words of ancient wisdom : “ Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life ! ”

\* \* \*

Commune with your own soul ! This is possible only if you believe that there is somewhere hidden within you, though not always apparent, your Highest, what is Best for you in this life as well as for all eternity. It is this discovery alone that lifts man to the position wherein he becomes a law unto himself. Otherwise he is, and must be subject to some law from outside, even the law of public opinion, variable and unreliable as that law may be. But is not the man to be pitied who has not some sacred and secluded chamber in his heart into which he may retire, when the conflict of the world's opinions grows too distracting, and find for himself the light and guidance, the rest and peace he wants ? The one condition absolutely necessary for this is perfect sincerity or truthfulness to self, and an unreserved self-surrender. For whether the man calls it by that name or not, such self-communion is, in fact, communion with the infinite Spirit of God himself from whom is all holiness, and light and joy.

## LITERATURE AND LIFE.

*(By Principal H. R. James.)*

Our system of education still pays homage to literature. You see this in the fact that one complete course of education is frankly recognized as literature. You see it also in the requirement of a modicum of literature in the course which is called scientific. I propose to show in this paper that literature is an essential part of all true education ; that it must be so on any adequate conception of the meaning and purpose of education.

This is not altogether unnecessary, because it cannot be questioned that the place of literature in education has been greatly modified in the last fifty years everywhere, and in India specially, in the last twenty. Literature has still a sovereignty but it is no longer an exclusive and unquestioned sovereignty. A great rival has appeared in the field, which disputes the supremacy. Many would now maintain the sufficiency, even the superiority of scientific education. There is a tendency to disparage not merely a purely literary education, but literary education as such. Our Indian systems are particularly under the influence of this bifurcation or fission. We have the Arts and Sciences neatly parted almost by a wall of separation, and the thesis whether a literary or scientific education is better, an A course or a B course, has become a stock subject in College debating societies. I am not now concerned directly with these sorely battered theses, but I am deeply concerned about the place of literature in education. It is not a question of acceptance or rejection of rivals, but of the due relation of elements indispensable in education of the highest kind. Science, by its magnificent practical achievement, has rightly won its place in the scholastic and academic curriculum ; but, it does not follow that it can anywhere be altogether substituted for Literature. It does not follow that our education can be deemed adequate in which Literature does not hold, not merely an integral part, but a great important part.

There are two ample reasons for this indispensableness of Literature : the nature of human society, and the need of something to hold it together : the nature of literature itself, and the influences it brings to bear on human mind and character.

1. Literature is the great common bond of education, the ground on which all can meet and vibrate with common sympathies. The realm

of the exact sciences is vast and wonderful. The miracles that Chemistry, Physiology and Bacteriology can work, or that result from the practical application of Electricity, Engineering, or Astronomy baffle the effort to recount them. But, the tendency of Science is specialization. It divides. Great and marvellous as are its achievements as regards things, this, it cannot be questioned, is its effect upon *men*. It does not tend to bring them together: it tends to separate them. It makes experts, specialists—not men.

This is no disparagement to Science, but arises from the fact of the immensity of the field of knowledge, and the sheer necessity of breaking it up into compartments. This tendency to differentiation is at once a common place and a postulate of scientific progress. Once science and philosophy were one, and both a part of literature. The Homeric poems, and the Mahābhārata, embody the science of the ages to which they belong, as well as from its poetry. Lucretius' great poem on Nature is at once a theory of the universe and an encyclopædia of the sciences, and a splendid poem. Now, not only do Science, Philosophy and Poetry form separate spheres, but, science itself is broken up into the sciences; and though each novice in science must be grounded in the rudiments of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry, the master of science must, in proportion to his ambitions for mastery, confine himself more and more to one science or branch of a science. Physics breaks up into Sound, Light, Heat, Electricity; Chemistry into Organic and Inorganic, Physical and Electrical Chemistry. Not only does Biology split up into Physiology and Botany, but Physiology subdivides into Embryology, Morphology, Histology, and Bacteriology. Each science has a language and a literature of its own. Within the sphere of a science, only the specialist is allowed to speak, for, he alone is qualified to understand; and as the extent of each science widens and widens, it becomes more and more veritably true that only the specialist, the man who has devoted a lifetime to the study of the data of the science, is qualified to speak. Undoubtedly the ideal of science is this specialization, and if the scientific ideal were to prevail, and every man were to become a specialist, the ultimate result reached would be that men would be divided up into groups whose members would commune intimately with each other, but could hold no communion with the other groups. The more scientific science becomes, the more must this come to pass. Plainly

some opposing influence is needed to keep men intellectually together, some bond, some common meeting ground. This common meeting ground is best afforded by Literature.

It does not, of course, need any demonstration that man cannot live by science alone. A man of science, no less than a lawyer or a carpenter, must live as a man among men. It might, however, perhaps be thought that his common interest in the ordinary concerns of life, domestic, commercial, political, would be enough to keep him in touch with his fellows. The specialist must eat and drink, make friends and enemies, write letters and read the papers, concern himself more or less closely in affairs, parochial, municipal, political : he has as much share as others in social problems and questions of the day, whether of education, government, war or peace, action or thought. This is true ; but it is precisely because the specialist has a part to play, a share to take in life outside the laboratories, that he needs some share of education other than a strictly scientific education. He needs as much as anybody else, what all alike need, *education for life itself*. And, that widest and most comprehensive education is most readily given by Literature.

This is the first reason for the necessary inclusion of Literature in every scheme of education. Life, in a civilized community, makes its demands on all, and education, not to fail of its full aim, should embrace preparation for life in this comprehensive sense, as well as preparation for the practical business of following a calling or earning a livelihood, which is only part of life, though a very important part of it.

Does anything so obvious need demonstration ? Education should be practical certainly. Education should fit a man for the work he will have to do in after life, the work by which his own life will be supported, and the lives of those dependent on him. The education, which fails to fit him for some special calling and for a calling which is open to him, and a calling in which he can find the support, the livelihood indispensable for him, has failed grievously : all this is agreed. And yet it is manifest, also, to any one who considers a little, that this provision of means of subsistence by preparation for a definite profession or craft is not the whole of life. In a purely socialistic state, it might be enough ; though even in that, the need for recreation would remain, and all the personal and social sides of life. But, in a

complex state of society like the modern, very much more is needed to equip a man to play his part fitly at all. It is still more needed from the standpoint of the community as a whole, to preserve it in a sound and happy condition, and safeguard it from dangers. If we look broadly to the miseries which afflict states, and to the maladies which have corrupted and destroyed them, we see that they have sprung very largely from the action of undisciplined egotism ; from the violent clash of interests, in which one party is besotted with the aspect of things seen from its own standpoint, and stupidly blinded to the claims of others. This selfishness, and blindness are at the root of all selfishness, and clamorous outcry against injustice, whether the selfishness is intentional or unconscious, whether the injustice is real or perversely imagined. Hence come all wars, feuds, plots, slanders, quarrels, enmities and all that disturb the peace of human society and breed disorder. It is the same in ultimate causation in the wars that shake empires and in the petty quarrels that disturb families or villages. All are due ultimately to the selfishness and stupidity which make men vehement for their own desires and rights, insensible to the claims and wishes of others, who differ from them. In its worst form, it produces a French Revolution or the downfall of the Roman Empire. In its pettiest forms, it produces village disputes, family feuds, and factions in a college. Now, whether it be considered on the great scale or the petty, the corrective of this deplorable tendency in men and women—which is due, after all, to their natural, mental limitations as much as to positive evil tendencies in the enlargement of experience and training of judgment. Education, in all its varieties, tends to some extent, to this enlargement and enfranchisement of the human spirit, to its lifting out of the pettiest restrictions of the narrow self. But, the extent to which technical education of any kind, whether in Mathematics, languages or in any one of the exact sciences, can effect this liberation, is as nothing compared with the effect of literature.

2. This appears from a consideration of what literature is, and what its efficacy may be expected to be. What is Literature ? If it were necessary to give a formal definition of Literature that would find general acceptance, I might, at this point, be brought up short, and get no further in demonstrating the necessity of the study of Literature. But, it is enough for the present practical purpose that literature is all the best books that have been written, all that appeal

to the reader in his general attributes as man : that a book to be deemed literature, must have artistic form, and reach a certain standard of style. It is a work of art in words. Literature is one form of the production of the beautiful. Its material is all that is interesting and instructive in life, and nature ; its instrument is words ; its form is literary expression, the melody and harmony of words. But, the appeal of Literature, its power to interest, delight and enthrall, as well as its power to instruct and mould character, arises from the interest of life itself, of human nature, and the complex action and reaction of forces in human society. *Literature is the contemplation or reflection of life raised to its highest power, illumined by the most penetrating insight, exalted by the most energetic emotions.* Through Literature, we reach points of view which a single individual could never attain to ; through Literature, we pass through experiences, ten thousand times ampler and more varied than can be crowded into a single life. Above all, in Literature, we find ideas and modes of thought which carry us out of ourselves and open the horizon on all sides.

What Literature essentially *is* and *does*, may best be seen by examination of that form of Literature, which is in the supreme sense literature—Poetry. Poetry may be so called, because in poetry there is more of conscious, artistic form than in prose : the emotion which raises words into literature, clothes itself naturally in rhythmical form, is stronger, and the form itself in which it finds expression obeys more definite rules. Then listen to Wordsworth :—"Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge ; it is the impassioned expression which is in the Countenances of all Science. Emphatically may it be said of the poet.....that 'he looks before and after.' He is the rock of defence for human nature ; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs : in spite of things gone silently out of mind, and things violently destroyed, the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, over all time..... Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man."

In this famous passage, Wordsworth is asserting on behalf of poetry the very claim I am making for all literature. He even makes the contrast with science which I indicated in the beginning. "The

man of Science," he says, "seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in solitude: the poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion."

What is true in this intensified and exalted sense of poetry, must be true in a broader, elastic sense of all Literature. The realm of Literature is made up of several tributary kingdoms. He, who ranges at large over anyone of these domains, is a free man of the world of Literature, and enters into the benefits of spiritual enlargement which this great citizenship bestows. He only, who ranges at pleasure over all, and finds delight and instruction alike in novels and drama, in serious prose and in poetry, is, in the full sense, 'lettered.' To want the appreciation of any one division, is to fall short of full spiritual manhood. To want them all, to have no literature, is to be maimed and defective in respect of some of the noblest capacities of the human mind. Literature matures the mind to its full stature, just because it is in touch with human nature and human society at all points and represents all that concerns them. He, who would attain to that comprehension of his fellows, which makes him secure master of himself and his environment, must get it either from infinite experience, or from books: and as he cannot get it in experience—except that perhaps now and again extraordinary genius may—he must either get it from books, or be without it. One science or many sciences, will not bring him that sympathetic insight into life and his fellowmen, that he needs practically. The accomplished specialist, if he lacks Literature, may be a very defective man—aye, though he invents the steam-engine, discovers the origin of species or wields the sceptre of an empire.

To illustrate this practically, what an opening of horizon, what an expansion of experience and sympathy is brought in the reading of Thackeray's "Esmond," of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" of Shakespeare's "King Lear," or a volume of Browning. Reading must be with understanding, it is true, but the understanding comes with reading, and at any rate, reading is the condition. It has been recognized down the ages that liberal education was contained in Homer and in the Mahābhārata, and the same would only be less true of the whole of Shakespeare or Spencer's Faery Queene, of Scott, of Thackeray, of Michelett, of George Eliot, to think only of English Literature; equally of Dante, of Goethe, of Bankim Chandra, or Firdausi, and

if this be true of single authors, how much more true must it be of a wide range of general reading! As the range and variety is extended, experience is proportionally widened and the understanding enlarged. It matters very much what authors are chosen, and what books are read: but, it matters vastly more that there should be study and appreciation of some literature, rather than of none. From this ultimate standpoint, it does not so much matter what literature is read, so long as there is *some* literature. Browning or Tennyson, Wordsworth or Shelley, Thackeray or Dickens, major poets or minor poets, poetry or prose, novels or history, philosophy or *belles lettres*, Greek or German, Latin or Bengali; so long as there is diligent reading and reading of *Literature*, some spiritual development on the humanistic side must follow, some of the quickening and refining effects of the study of Literature. It matters first and foremost then, that there should be *some study of Literature*: secondly it matters that there should be right choice of Literature.

My object in presenting this subject has not been merely academic, but, in the most definite sense, practical. The argument is addressed alike to those who love Literature, and who need no convincing that they may be established in good ways; and to those who care nothing about Literature, that they may be admonished and brought to a better mind.

I shall not, I suppose, be accused of extravagance, if I assume that such contempters of Literature exist: that even possibly some are among the audience in this hall: people who understand the uses of newspapers and scientific text books, but, who have no care for and interest in Literature as such. If the contentions which I have maintained hold, the loss of such persons is incalculable. Apart from the loss of a vast stock of potential pleasure, which a library offers, there is undoubtedly in want of appreciation of Literature, danger which I have pointed out, the danger of failure in sympathy and comprehension between men separate, by difference of practical interests and occupations. There is another danger, which educational thinkers are realizing—loss of the power of expression. Students of Science through want of literary training, are unable to express their ideas simply and intelligently. I am not in this thinking so much of Calcutta, as of what I was told in London few years ago.



These are real and definite losses which can be put to, and understood by the most practically minded. But, assuredly, I could not limit the spiritual efficacy and value of Literature to these effects only. There is, besides these, the mysterious power of supreme literature, to allure and enthrall minds, attuned to respond to its thrilling chords and harmonies. This is in the full sense, the power and value of Literature and in vindicating the place of Literature in education, it is on this infinite spiritual enrichment rather than on lower motives that I should chiefly base my appeal.

Is it possible actually to *demonstrate* the alluring, the over-mastering charm of Literature to show it by examples that will compel conviction? It may be said that those who already have the gift of Literature need no convincing; while those who have it not, cannot be persuaded by examples: for they cannot feel their force. Literature needs the trained judgment which is only acquired by long experience of the best in Literature: to know and feel the finer powers of Literature needs literary education, as the appreciation of great music needs musical education. This is true. Nevertheless I will try; because, at all events, the germs of musical and literary faculty are found in every man: the chords of sense and intellect may be touched and wakened. Asking your indulgence, I will then, before I conclude, offer a few examples of Literature in illustration of my thesis. I will use poetry as the most crucial test.

Take, first, a poet's expression of that elusive quality in beauty—the end and consummation of all Art—which poets and men of science in vain labour to account for:—

“ If all the pens that ever poets hold  
 Had fed the feeling of their master's thought,  
 And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,  
 Their minds and muses on admired themes;  
 If all the heavenly quintessence they still  
 From their immortal flowers of poesy,  
 Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive  
 The highest reaches of a human wit;  
 If these had made one poem's period  
 And all combined in beauty's worthiness,  
 Yet should there hover in their restless heads  
 One thought, one grace, one wonder at the least,  
 Which, into words no virtue can digest.”

I believe these lines get nearer to the heart of the mystery than the whole Mr. Balfour's recent Romanes Lecture.

Next, let me illustrate the passion felt in the contemplation of Nature whether from a headland Lake Country on the coast of Cumberland or the shores of the Ganges or in the presence of the snow summit of the Himalayas.

Sound needed none,  
Nor any voice of joy ; his spirit drank  
The spectacle ; sensation, soul, and form  
All melted into him ; they swallowed up  
His animal being ; *in* them did he live,  
And, *by* them did he live, they were his life.  
In such access of mind, in such high hour  
Of visitation from the living God,  
Thought was not : in enjoyment it expired.  
No thanks be breathed, be proffered no request ;  
Rapt into still communion transcends  
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,  
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power  
That made him ; it was blessedness and love !

The same may be illustrated in a different mood, and key from Shelley.

I love all that thou lovest,  
Spirit of delight !  
The fresh earth in new leaves dressed,  
And the starry night,  
Autumn evening, and the morn  
When the golden mists are born.  
I love now, and all the form  
Of the radiant frost ;  
I love waves and winds and storms,—  
Everything almost  
Which is Nature's, and may be  
Untainted by man's misery.  
I love tranquil solitude,  
And such societies  
As is quiet, wise and good.  
Between thee and me  
What difference ? But thou dost possess  
The things I seek, not love them less.

The poets hold the secrets of life and death, of love and hate, of joy and sorrow : they know the emptiness of ambition : they teach the true

ends of human action. The hard way of the ambitious is vividly described by Edward Spenser :

" Some thought to raise themselves to high degree  
By riches and unrighteous reward ;  
Some by close shouldering, some by flattery  
Others through friends, other for base regard ;  
And all by wrong ways, for themselves prepared ;  
Those that were up themselves, kept others low ;  
Those that were low themselves, held others hard,  
Nor suffered them to rise and greater grow,  
But everyone did strive his fellow down to throw.

In contrast with this, hear another Elizabethan :

" The chief use then in man of that he knows  
Is his painstaking for the good of all ;  
Not fleshly wreping from our own made woes,  
Not laughing from a melanchly fall,  
Not hating from a soul that overflows  
With bitterness, breathed out from inward thrall ;  
But sweetly rather to ease, love and bind,  
As need requires, this frail fallen human kind."

Another tells as the true pattern of manhood :

" The best of men  
That e'er wore earth about him, was a sufferer,  
A soft, meek patient, humble tranquil spirit,  
The first true gentlemen that ever breathed."

Death is terrible and ugly ; but, the poets write many beautiful things of death, and none more beautiful than this of Walt Whitman's :

" Come lovely and soothing death  
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving,  
arriving,  
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,  
Sooner or later, delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,  
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,  
And for love, sweet love—but, praise ! praise ! praise !  
For the sure enwinding arms of awe-inspiring death."

The poet crytallizes a thousand perceptions into a phrase which gives a sense of finality and perfection in which the mind finds rest in its uneasy quest for expression :

"The moving waters at their priestlike task  
Of pure ablutions round earth's human shore,"  
"Share in the universal alms of light,"  
"Love is a circle that does restless move  
In the same sweet eternity of love,"  
"The thousand sweet, still joys of such  
As hand in hand face earthly life."  
"Meanwhile the mind from pleasure less  
Withdraws into its happiness ;  
The minds, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find ;  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
For other worlds, and other seas ;  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade."

Have I made any headway ? Will you allow that these examples chosen with difficulty, because of the endless wealth of material, prove my thesis ? Or, have I merely added weariness to weariness. This is for the profane—the initiated themselves know the inexhaustible satisfactions of Literature, the fund of pleasure and refreshment on which we can draw, and draw without fear of denial. Whatever our situation and circumstances, there is exhilaration, restoration, solace for those who keep their love of literature. So, I conclude with one more example, which is a kind of confession of faith for those who in all the vicissitudes of life, find strength and stay in Literature :—

"My mind to me a kingdom is  
Such present joys therein I find  
That it excels all other bliss  
That earth affords or grows by kind!  
Though much I want which most would have,  
Yet still my mind forbids to crave.  
I laugh not at another's loss,  
I grudge not at another's gain ;  
To worldlywaves my mind can toss ;  
My state at one doth still remain ;  
I fear no foe, I fawn no friend ;  
I loath not life, nor dread my end.  
My wealth is health, and perfect ease ;  
My conscience clear my chief defence ;  
I neither seek by bribes to please,  
Nor by deceit to give offence,  
Thus do I live ; thus will I die ;  
Would all did so as well as I !"

**BEFORE E. B. BROWNING'S PICTURE.****I.**

Cold, blue-veined eye-lids hiding  
Within eyes' brooding gleams,  
Wan, slow lips with abiding  
Suggestions, so meseems,  
Of songs that thrill with yearning  
For words, gold hair inurning  
A flower-like small face turning  
Down with its weight of dreams,

**II.**

Sweet limbs as lyre-strings tender,  
Sensitive so, I ween,  
To strains that may attend her  
Dream-cradled sleep serene !  
For when life's fiery roses  
Night one by one slow closes,  
The sense in soul reposes  
To hear new strains begin.

**III.**

We sleep, as gloom befalleth  
Our senses, sensuous sleep,  
For her sleep only calleth  
From the deep to the deep !  
Her soul then dawns serenely—  
The woman-soul and queenly—  
In a smile blooming thinly  
Like rose in wild wind's sweep.

**IV.**

Dawns in that smile ethereal,—  
The fresh-born butterfly  
Drops chrysalid material  
And rests ere off 'twill fly  
On lips that now embolden  
The lights of its wings golden  
Into relief,—beholden  
Of angels close that nigh.

## V.

The mother-heart of passion  
That sang through maiden mouth,  
Is it enclosed this fashion  
Within that breast of youth ?  
Do mother-fears encumber,  
As "children cry," thy slumber ?  
Are thy griefs without number,  
Thy joys not thine in sooth ?

## VI.

Heart of the mother watching  
" *The child asleep*,"—now far  
More sweet, "beyond all touching,"  
Watch like his natal star,—  
Mild as in autumn nature,  
O, here as I now watch her  
Do I in every feature  
See that warm heart her ?

## VII.

Or when moonlights Italian  
Grew dreamful with thy song,  
As Casa breezes blew on  
Caught thy stray breaths along,  
Stole o'er thee then this tender  
Dream-mellowed look, I wonder,  
O, face divinely slender,  
O, lips majestic strong !

SUKUMAR DUTT.

Written, 11th June, 1910.

## REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

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